



# Zika & Pregnancy

## What is Zika?

Zika is a viral disease caused by the Zika virus that causes flu-like and other symptoms. It is spread to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito, and can also be spread sexually as well.

## What is microcephaly and what causes it?

Microcephaly is a rare condition in which an infant's head is significantly smaller than the heads of other children of the same age and sex. It is the result of the brain not developing normally during pregnancy. A fetus is most vulnerable during the first and early second trimester. Children with microcephaly often have developmental delays. There is no treatment, but early interventions, such as speech and occupational therapies, can help improve function and quality of life.

Microcephaly can be caused by a variety of genetic, metabolic, and environmental factors. Genetic causes are the most common causes of microcephaly and can be complex. The most common environmental causes of microcephaly include drug or toxin exposure or maternal infection during pregnancy.

## What's the relationship between Zika virus and microcephaly in newborns?

There is an established, causal link between Zika infection and microcephaly (abnormally small head), as well as other severe fetal birth defects (eye defects, hearing loss, impaired growth) in newborns. It is suspected that pregnant women who contract Zika virus through the bite of an infected mosquito or through sexual transmission are at risk of the fetal birth defect. Emerging studies show that the risk of birth defects in babies is highest among women who had sexual contact with a symptomatic partner during pregnancy or women who developed symptoms of illness during pregnancy.

## If I am pregnant is it safe to travel to regions with Zika virus?

Pregnant women in any trimester should highly consider postponing travel to any area with ongoing Zika transmission. Pregnant women and those planning on getting pregnant who do decide to travel internationally should first speak with their healthcare provider prior to travel to make sure they fully understand the risks involved. The most important step to take is to avoid mosquito bites while abroad and also be aware symptomatic sexual partners who also travel to a Zika-affected region may also be able to spread the infection to their pregnant partners. Pregnant women who travel abroad to areas where Zika virus is circulating should mention their travel to their healthcare provider during all prenatal check-ups so they can be monitored closely.

## How do I protect myself from Zika virus while traveling abroad during pregnancy?

There is no vaccine to protect against Zika virus. The best protection from Zika virus, as well as other common mosquitoborne infections, is to prevent mosquito bites while in a country with ongoing Zika transmission. This can be done by using insect repellent, which is safe for use in both pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers.

Other preventive measures include: wearing clothes (preferably light-colored) that cover as much of the body as possible; using physical barriers such as screens, closed doors and windows; and sleeping under mosquito nets. It is also important to empty, clean or cover containers that can hold even small amounts of water such as buckets, flower pots, so that places where mosquitoes can breed are removed.

## What are the current travel recommendations?

Refer to the CDC Traveler's Health website for current information on travel advisories. <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>.

**Is it safe to have sex with my male partner who recently traveled or resides in an area with Zika transmission if I am pregnant?**

Pregnant women should refrain from sexual activity or consistently/correctly use condoms during sex (i.e., vaginal and anal intercourse, fellatio) for the duration of pregnancy if their male partner lives in or has traveled to an area of active Zika virus transmission. Following this advice is important because the infection is most often asymptomatic, and we do not yet know the extent to which asymptotically infected men shed Zika in their semen.

**If a woman is not pregnant and bitten by a mosquito that is infected with Zika virus, will future pregnancies be at risk?**

No. Zika virus usually remains in the blood of an infected person for up to a week. Babies conceived after the virus has cleared the blood are no longer at risk for infection.

**I am a pregnant woman who traveled to an area with Zika virus and am now ill or believe I may have been exposed. Do I need to be tested for the Zika virus or have my fetus tested for microcephaly?**

If you are pregnant and have had travel to an area with ongoing Zika virus transmission you can be tested for Zika virus up to 12 weeks after your return from travel. Both ill and non-ill pregnant women with appropriate travel history should contact their healthcare provider to be tested. Your provider will consult with the OSDH Acute Disease Service to determine the specific testing needed for both Zika infection or other infectious diseases based on your symptoms and travel history. In regards to testing for microcephaly, your provider will determine your need to have your fetus tested for microcephaly. Testing of the fetus for microcephaly is available by ultrasound and can be conducted by your obstetrician if indicated. An ultrasound can typically detect microcephaly around 20-22 weeks gestation, but no earlier than 18 weeks.

**Can a previous Zika virus infection cause someone who later becomes pregnant to have an infant with microcephaly?**

We now know there is a risk to the baby if a woman is infected with Zika virus while she is pregnant. However, Zika virus infection does not pose a risk of birth defects for future pregnancies. Zika virus usually remains in the blood of an infected person for about a week. The virus will not cause infections in a baby that is conceived after the virus is cleared from the blood.

**If I am a woman who has traveled to an area with Zika virus transmission, should I wait to get pregnant?**

Men or women **diagnosed with Zika** or **have symptoms** consistent with Zika infection (fever, rash, arthralgia, conjunctivitis) and have traveled to an area with ongoing Zika transmission:

- Women should wait at least eight weeks after their symptoms of illness started before attempting to get pregnant.
- Men should wait at least six months after their symptoms of illness started before having unprotected sex.

Men or women **without symptoms of Zika** who recently traveled or had sexual contact with partner who recently traveled:

- It is recommended to wait at least eight weeks before trying to get pregnant.

**Zika resources:**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Travel Health Notices. <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Zika Virus Resource Site. <http://www.cdc.gov/zika/index.html>

Pan American Health Organization. Questions and Answers: Zika and Pregnancy. [http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=11552&Itemid=41672&lang=en](http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11552&Itemid=41672&lang=en)